

The law a friend

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[0 : 00] Let us turn our attention now to Romans chapter 7, reading at verse 7. Romans chapter 7, reading at verse 7.

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law. For I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.

For without the law, sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

And the commandment which was a deign to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

[1 : 08] Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid.

But sin that it might appear sin, working death in me, by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

That's a section that's quite difficult to understand. And I know that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones preached a series of sermons on Romans, which lasted for some ten years.

But I suppose were I to try to do that, if it were possible, instead of keeping the congregation in the free north, the free north would begin to empty. So I wouldn't try to attempt that sort of thing.

But just what I'm trying to do is to give you a look, in a kind of broad sweep, at what this epistle is saying to us.

[2 : 12] And I think that if, I don't know what your method of Bible study is, but if you don't have a particular method of Bible study, if you say, well, you know, I don't really know how to study the Bible, well, perhaps you could do no better than just take these verses from verse 7 to verse 13 and make them a kind of study for yourself throughout this coming week.

So that whatever I might say, you might recall and you might begin to understand something of what Paul is saying in his epistle to the Romans.

Now, in the preceding verses, we saw how the apostle uses the marriage bond to illustrate our union with the law.

And as I have said, apart from adultery and willful desertion, marriage is for life. The only legitimate factor which ends a marriage is death.

And what Paul is saying to us is that we are married to the law. But what an exacting and what a merciless partner the law is.

[3 : 36] And in our union with the law, we have been unfaithful. We have been guilty of breaking the prohibitions that the law lays down.

We have been guilty of spiritual adultery. Now remember what we said last Sabbath evening that the Mosaic legislation says this with regard to infidelity in marriage.

It says that infidelity in marriage is punishable by death. And the man that commits adultery with another man's wife, even he that commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

Now, when we were united to the law in our unconverted days, and I am speaking to those of you who are Christians here this evening, the law then being our husband condemned us.

Condemned us for our turpitudes. The law demanded our death. And in Christ, you see, we die.

[4 : 56] In Christ, we have risen to newness of life. We are now free. Free to be united to Christ who is our new Lord and our new husband.

Now this is how Bishop Moore puts it. I think it's very well done. He says, Paul has told us that the law of God was at first, ideally, our mystic husband and that we were unfaithful in our wedded life

and that the injured Lord sentenced to death his guilty spouse and that the sentence was carried out in Christ.

Thus, says Bishop Moore, a death divorce took place between us the justified and the law regarded as the violated party in the covenant.

That's why Paul says that he rejoiced to be free from the law because the law was a merciless husband. But now in this section the apostle goes on to tell us what the law of God does in our pre and in our post-conversion experience.

You see, before Paul was converted the law made known to him sin and the law caused him to realize how spiritually dead he was.

[6 : 39] and that's what the law of God will do to you if you are an unconverted person here this night and if you are going to be converted. The law of God will show to you what sin is and the law of God will also show to you how dead spiritually you are.

Now these verses before us can be regarded as an autobiographical sketch of the apostle's life under conviction of sin just prior to his conversion.

You see, he tells us that he had not realized the awfulness of covetousness until the commandment came into operation.

and when the commandment of God came into operation the commandment of God showed to him how heinous sin is.

I was reading Professor John Murray on these words and he says this this passage is an account of pre-regenerate experience.

[7 : 56] It is not however the period of pre-regenerate self-complacency Now mark these words It is not the experience of pre-regenerate self-complacency but says Professor Murray his experience these words are his experience after he had been aroused from his spiritual torpor and awakened to a sense of his sin It is the preparatory and transitional phase of his spiritual pilgrimage when shaken by the conviction which the law of God ministers his state of mind was no longer one of unperturbed calm and self-esteem Now we ask ourselves what does the law of God do at this period in the transitional experience of a man who is just about to be converted what the law of God does is this it defines what sin is it makes known to us our spiritual deadness and the law of God discovers to us that the source of that deadness is not the law the source of that deadness is our own sin

Now let's look at these three propositions then First of all we might say that the law of God defines what sin is and that's outlined for us in verses 7 and 8 What shall we say then Is the law sin?

God forbid Nay I had not known sin but by the law for I had not known lust except the law had said thou shalt not come out but sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence for without the law sin was dead Now here you see the apostle is defining for us what sin is or rather the law is defining for us what sin is we are not to think as we have said that there is anything sinful about the law the law doesn't create sin nor does the law of God induce us to sin you see as the apostle tells us here in this passage the law of God is intrinsically holy it is just it is good and what the law of God does is it acts as a barrier it's a hedge just as sometimes there are hedges to mark out a pathway the law of God is like a hedge and it shows us the way that we ought to go and we are not to think that we don't have a standard of morality except for God's written law we do even in our unconverted days when we paid no attention to God's written law we did have twinges of conscience about what was right and about what was wrong and it's quite true that wherever primitive people are found you will always find that these primitive people are never devoid of a code of morality a code of conduct you see it means doesn't it that we all have the law of God written on our hearts and unless we are completely hardened our conscience will disturb us when we breach

God's law when we do something that we ought not to do our conscience will come and disturb us even although we might not read the Bible but you see it's through the Ten Commandments it's through reading the Ten Commandments that God defines what sin is and he does this by a series of prohibitions first these prohibitions prohibitions are there as far as God is concerned and then there are these prohibitions as far as our fellow men are concerned now Paul gives us an example of this you see he cites the Tenth Commandment thou shalt not covet now let's go back to Exodus chapter 20 where the law of

[13 : 43] God is given to us in its fullness and listen to what it says this is God speaking thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife nor his manservant nor his

maidservant servant nor his ox nor his ass nor anything that is thy neighbor's thou shalt not covet I had not known sin but by the law I had not known lust except the law had said thou shalt not covet but sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence now notice the words that

Paul is using here he is using lust he is using covetousness he is using concupiscence now by using these three terms lust covetousness and concupiscence Paul is emphasizing the same thing what does lust mean lust means evil desire what does covetousness mean covetousness means illicit desire of every kind and what does concupiscence mean concupiscence means inordinate desire and these three terms are all expressive of the wrong motivation that takes place in a man's life and what is the wrong motivation what is the wrong motivation that Paul realized was in his own life the wrong motivation was the love of self self love now we ask ourselves this question what is sin

I know the shorter catechism gives a definition we may describe sin as willful disobedience of the divine commandment we may say that sin is deliberate acts of wickedness and these definitions are correct but you see behind these manifestations whether it be disobedience to the divine command or whether it be a deliberate act of wickedness behind these manifestations there is the love of self the enthronement of self the worship of self you see if you study the ten commandments you will notice how these ten commandments prohibit idolatry and I just mentioned some of them these ten commandments prohibit idolatry they prohibit murder they prohibit adultery they prohibit dishonesty and what they are doing is they are emphasizing the desire that exists in us all to gratify our own ego to gratify our own ego at the expense of

God and at the expense of our fellow men and that is sin and that's why the apostle takes the sin of covetousness because behind all sin is really covetousness lust desire what the law of God does is it shows us the evil of deviating from the prescribed way of God and it arouses in us the law of God a realization of that evil I had not known lust except the law had said thou shalt not covet you see in his unconverted state Paul was asleep and being asleep he was never really disturbed by sin but once his self complacency gave way to apprehension he began to realize as never before the corruption of his whole nature and he says and sin taking occasion by the commandment or as the revised version puts it but sin finding opportunity in the commandment wrought in me all kinds of covetousness you see there is a sense in which the law provokes sin and that is when it forbids sin do you know that

I'll say that again there is a sense in which the law provokes sin and that's when it forbids sin for instance there might be a notice and that notice covers some documents that are lying on a desk or in an envelope the notice is on the envelope it says private and immediately you see this notice saying private there is created within you a desire to know what does it say you know sometimes a doctor will give you a line and say take this to a specialist but he's closed the envelope and to all intents and purposes it's private and you know there is a niggling desire in your own mind to open that envelope and to find out what has the doctor said about you it's the same you see sometimes you see in a door do not enter and sometimes as you read this sign do not enter it creates it arouses within you a yearning to find out what is beyond the door and that's what Paul is saying here sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence sin provoked sin disturbed me

[21 : 18] I wanted the law provoked the law disturbed me and I wanted to find out what it was all about you see the divine command says thou shalt not and our depraved will responds with an emphatic I shall God says thou shalt not and in my depravity I say I shall and so you see the law of God is defining now what sin is how evil sin is how diabolically wicked sin is and what the law of God is it's like a spotlight and this spotlight as it goes round there it picks out this sin and it picks out that sin and it picks out the other sin and it says there that's sin and that's what the law of God does it defines sin but the law of God also reveals our spiritual deadness

I learned that this is the second proposition I learned that from verses 9 through 2 11 I was alive he says without the law once but when the commandment came sin revived and I died and the commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death for sin taking occasion by the commandment deceived me and by it slew me you see what he is saying is that when he lived in the days when he lived as a careless sinner and when he paid no heed to the spiritual impact of God's law Paul tells us that sin was dead in his experience for without the law sin was dead when the law didn't bother me in those days he says sin was a dead thing to me it never worried me it

never disturbed me in those days before his shattering experience on the Damascus road the apostle was quite unperturbed about his state of alienation from God he lived in those days a self complacent a self satisfied a smug kind of life and as far as he was concerned the law of God played no part in his behaviour and is that not true with regard to all of us before we come under the conviction of sin before we come under the conviction of sin sin is dead to us doesn't trouble us we don't go about every day thinking about sin in our unconverted days we never bother we never worry about whether sin has alienated us from God or not we're quite happy quite pleased with ourselves we are self complacent self satisfied we never hear God speaking to us above the din or the merriment of a godless world but when we come under the quickening power of the

Holy Spirit suddenly the law of God springs to life suddenly the law of God begins to show us what sin is and how loathsome sin is Paul says I was alive without the law once but when the commandment came when I came under conviction when the commandment came he says sin revived sin became a living thing and when that happened I died in other words once he came under the conviction of sin he was made aware of his corruption and being made aware of his corruption he died or he was brought to a state of loathing and misery because what is death when someone dies what does it mean it means this doesn't it that when someone dies that person has been brought to a state of loathsomeness a state of offensiveness

I don't find anything beautiful about a dead body do you to me as I look at a dead body it's loathsome and even if it's one of my own loved ones who has died and I feel very much for them there comes a time when I feel like Abraham of old bury the dead out of my sight you can't stand it any longer it's a thing that is offensive and that's what Paul means sin revived sin became now a living thing and I died it became loathsome to me offensive what then did the apostle do under this state of conviction and the commandment he says which was ordained to life

[27 : 57] I found to be unto death for sin taking occasion by the commandment deceived me and by it slew me what the apostle did when sin revived in his experience when he came under the quickening power of the Holy Ghost he turned to the law he turned to the law in the hope that the law would give him life but instead of the law giving him life it only brought him to death that's all that the law can do you see he thought that conformity to God's law would deliver him from his sin instead he discovered that the law of God which should have led to his happiness could only lead to his misery to his death because let's remember this that

God's law can never pardon a transgressor if you go to the law of God tonight as a sinner and say to the law pardon me for my sins the law will say no I can't pardon you for your sins sins the law of God will say to you I demand from you punishment for your sins I demand from you the ultimate and that is death God's law cannot pardon a transgressor it can only condemn God's law demands satisfaction for its infringement for sin says the apostle taking occasion by the commandment deceive me and by it slew me what he means is that he was self deceived into thinking that he could satisfy the law's requirements and attain to favour with God instead he discovered that the law could not be satisfied in human terms the law demanded death the law slew him and this is the sin you see this is the mistake that the apostle later on accuses the Jews of he says they have a righteousness of their own and they go about to establish that righteousness and they refuse to submit to the righteousness of God they're trying by the law to satisfy

God and you'll never satisfy God by the law it's a mistake isn't it we sometimes make it ourselves tonight maybe someone here might be quickened God grant that there might be someone here who will be quickened an arrow of conviction lands in your heart you say to yourself I'm a sinner I'm a hell deserving sinner what am I going to do what can I do you say to me can I go to the law of God will the law of God help me I say to you no the law of God can't help you the law of God can never give you a pardon the law of God condemns you and demands from you your death and the commandment which was ordained to life

I found to be unto death for sin taking occasion by the commandment deceived me I was deceived into thinking that it could be satisfied instead it slew me now when God's law by the Holy Spirit's application of it to our consciences when it comes like that we discover as we have never discovered before how dead we are dead to God spiritually dead and it's beyond us to come to life you see what the law of God is doing you see how it operated in the apostle's experience he discovered that the law of God couldn't give him life but what the law of God did was this it showed him how dead he was how spiritually dead he was and that only God could quicken him only God

could save him only God could rescue him that leads me to this third proposition which I leave with you to consider the law in itself is holy that's what he says that's what the apostle says in verse 12 there wherefore he says the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good and what he says is that the law in itself which is holy just and good points to the source of this spiritual death which is in operation in our lives and what is the source what is the cause of this spiritual death it's sin and again you see the law is pointing to the villain of the piece the law of God is pointing to sin and saying it's sin that's done the damage we come back to

Paul's opening question in the section that we are considering this evening verse 7 and we ask is God's law responsible for my sin and death is God's law responsible for my sin and for my death and the apostle's response is an emphatic negative no says the apostle Paul the law of God is not the cause of your sin nor is the law of God the cause of your death the law is God's standard and being God's standard it is in keeping with his holy character and that's why Paul categorically says the law is holy and the commandment holy unjust and good well if

[35 : 30] God's law is good does it lead to death no definitely not says Paul it's not the law that leads to death it's sin that leads to death the law certainly has condemning power the law passes the sentence of death upon those who violate its precepts but in itself the law is good and had it been kept perfectly it would have led to life here are these ten commandments you see supposing Adam had kept these commandments supposing Adam hadn't sinned against God Adam would have lived he would never have died he would have passed beyond the realm of death now supposing you hadn't come into this world as a corrupt sinner and supposing

God had laid before you the ten commandments and said you keep these ten commandments if it had been possible for you to have kept these ten commandments you would never have died remember that the law is a good thing the law leads to life but it condemns the law breaker it declares the soul that sinneth it shall die but it's not the law that causes death it only declares death upon us as a due reward for sin it is sin it is sin that leads to death it is sin that alienates from God it is sin that is the enemy of man not the law of God was then that which is good made death unto me God forbid but sin that it might appear sin working death in me by that which is good that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful in other words the law shows us what sin is the law shows us sin in its loathsomeness the law shows us sin in its killing power and the purpose of the law in our pre-regenerate state when our self-complacency has come to an end is to show us our spiritual bankruptcy our deadness and the law shows us the awfulness of sin and then it leads us to Christ the saviour we read in

Galatians chapter 5 where the apostle says the law he says was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith but after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster now what is he saying we think of a schoolmaster like the schoolmasters we know today you know the schoolmaster we know today is the man who's in the school there and who is there to teach children to tell them the alphabet and to tell them how to do sums and to tell them all about English literature and the various other departments of education that's what the schoolmaster is there for but perhaps it's an unfortunate rendering in our English where it says the law was our schoolmaster because the Greek word there is the law was our paedagogues and the paedagogues in those days is not a man that you will find today in society the paedagogues are way back in the days of the Roman

Empire when Paul wrote these words was the man who was the servant and who was given charge of the school boy and it was his duty to take the school boy to the school to protect him on the way to lead him to the school now you see what Paul is saying the law he says is our paedagogues the law is our servant the law is there to lead us to Christ and once we've been brought to Christ the paedagogues is only useful in as far as Christ uses him but we will go on to look at the law the use of the law in the experience of the converted person but I just conclude the sermon this evening by saying this those of us who are Christians here tonight are thankful to God for the work of the law in its alarming in its arresting and in its awakening power we are thankful to

[41 : 27] God that the law led us to Christ to the one and the only one who could fulfill its precepts who could satisfy its infringement by his own life of obedience and by his own death on the cross but if you are not a Christian if you are not a Christian here tonight let me say this to you the law of God has you in its grip nor can you escape from it the law of God will pursue you throughout your life and the law of God will pursue you even in death and the law of God will be there before you when you come before God in judgment and the law of God will condemn you and the law of

God will pass the sentence of death upon you that's what the law does to the law breaker are you going to stay a law breaker by remaining bound to the law my friend escaped to Christ he has fulfilled the law for his people take him as your saviour you will find that the law has been a good friend then last week we said he was a bad husband friend this week we are saying he's a good friend in showing to us what sin is and showing to us the only escape from sin let us pray o lord our god we thank thee for thy word may we give attention to it may we ponder over what it has to say may we not rush foolishly or foolishly rush over these words but take time to consider their implications take time to consider o lord the depth of meaning in them and help us we pray thee to understand thy word better help us to put it into practice in our own lives be with us take us to our homes in safety forgive all our sins for Jesus sake amen